

Is It Over Yet?

Advocacy Corner Submitted by Ann Sheldon

(Note: This article was submitted before final budget language was completely available. Any changes due to vetoes will be posted to the OAGC website at www.oagc.com/?q=statebudget.)

The biennial state budget process usually means an uptick in advocacy activity for OAGC. This year's roller coaster ride of activity however was unparalleled. Each step in the process brought a new funding mechanism for gifted education and a new challenge for gifted advocates. To briefly recap the journey, here is a quick summary of the various proposals introduced since February:

First, the introduced version of the budget bill (HB 1) based gifted funding on a per ADM amount based on the Odden and Picus model that would have devastated gifted services. The House proposal integrated gifted funding into the organizational unit funding model, which ultimately would phase gifted funding into all school districts over a 10 year period. Finally, the Senate proposal would have created a temporary funding mechanism to fund districts at 2009 levels. At each critical stage of the budget process, gifted advocates were required to intensely advocate for appropriate changes. And at each critical stage in the budget process, gifted advocates showed they were capable of some of the most effective grass roots advocacy in the state.

Usually, once the Senate passes its version of the budget bill, everyone has a good idea of what level of funding is available for the next two years, and the funding mechanism does not change much from one biennium to the next. There is nothing usual about what transpired in this year's budget. The House and Senate treatment of education was completely different. The House favored the newly developed Ohio Evidence Based Model (OEBM), and the Senate favored a temporary funding mechanism that would eventually be built into a per pupil method of funding. The sticking point in the House vs. the Senate bill was the treatment of community schools. Ultimately, the conference committee, a bicameral, bipartisan committee designated to iron out the differences in the bill, decided on a compromise. The final outcome for education is a system based largely on the House passed version of the Ohio Evidence Based Model of funding. This model will be turned into a per pupil amount to fund both community schools and open enrollment students. Education funding decreases a little (.24%) over each year of the biennium. However, due to the infusions of federal stimulus dollars, only five districts lose funding.

This is not to say there were no education casualties in the budget. Non-public school funding saw a huge drop in funding over the biennium. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) will realize a 30% cut in agency funds to run the department. Virtually all education earmarks were eliminated. This includes the Summer Honors Institutes (SHI) which also was the funding source for the Martin Essex program. This is a big loss for gifted students, and we will need to fight to get the funding restored in the next budget. However, considering the huge cuts in other agency programs, it is amazing that gifted education was supported to the extent it was in the budget. So what are the changes? Basically, gifted funding is completely different now. As part of the OEBM formula, gifted funding is much better protected than it was under the current unit funding system. But there will still be issues of accountability we will need to attend to over the next biennium. Here is a brief summary of the changes:

The gifted education support component is broken into 4 factors:

- o Gifted identification factor at \$5 per ADM – no phase in
- o Gifted coordinator factor funded at 1 per 2500 ADM at a level of \$66,375 for FY2010 and \$67,660 for FY2011 – no phase-in (about 670 coordinators)
- o Gifted intervention specialist component funded at 1 GIS per organizational unit (roughly each elementary, middle school and high school) at the same level as the core teacher factor (\$56,902 for FY2010 and \$57,812 for FY2011). This component is phased-in at .2 in FY2010, .3 in FY2011, .4 in FY2012 and FY2013, .6 in FY2014 and FY2015, .8 in FY2016 and FY2017 and fully funded in FY2018. This factor is

multiplied by the challenge factor. This would equal about 640 GIS in FY2010 and in 960 GIS in FY2011.

- Professional development funds (\$1883) for gifted intervention specialists phased in along with the GIS levels.
- No districts will be allowed coordinator and GIS funding if they do not submit annual gifted plans or if they fail to identify gifted students.
- The funds will go for staffing and used for gifted services under the gifted operating standards with 15% of the funds for units from grades 6 – 12 allowed for services not provided by a gifted intervention specialist (e.g. content and arts specialists)
- Districts that currently receive gifted unit funding may spend no less than the amount they are currently receiving through unit funding.
- Districts that do not currently receive gifted unit funding may get a waiver for this biennium and possibly an additional year.
- A separate amount of funding will be available for ESC gifted units at \$8.1 million.
- Gifted funding is to be studied by the Ohio School Funding Advisory Council – though there is no gifted representation on the funding council.
- Enrichment funds are not to be used for gifted services.
- Excellent districts will not be bound by all mandates in the new system. However, they will be required to comply with the spending accountability provisions. The Ohio School Funding Advisory Council (SFAC) will determine how best to handle accountability of excellent school districts
- A gifted performance indicator will be developed by the state superintendent.

While not specifically related to gifted, there are other changes that may benefit gifted students:

- The OGT will be replaced by the ACT plus, which requires the ACT, end of course exams, and a senior thesis.
- E-Tech will be required to develop a statewide P-16 state education technology plan.
- An Interactive Video Distance Program pilot will be established to develop three Advanced Placement courses for districts that qualify.

It is important to note that due to declining revenues, the Conference Committee was forced to deal with a \$3.2 billion revenue shortfall as well as the education funding issue, which caused a two week delay in moving the budget forward. The governor provided a framework of cuts totally \$2.4 billion and proposed the introduction of Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs) at the race tracks to raise an additional \$933 million. Of course, as lottery funds are only to be used for primary and secondary education, so without these funds education funding would have been cut dramatically. This is when the budget process hit a snag. The Ohio Senate objected to the expansion of the lottery into the realm of gambling. After two weeks of very bitter partisan wrangling and some of the most depressing hearings I've ever attended, state leaders simply shut the doors, stopped the sniping and came up with a compromise. It was not easy. In the end, only six Republicans voted for the budget bill (one in the House, and five in the Senate). We probably have not heard the last of the budget, as education funding may be vulnerable if lottery funding revenue comes in under planned levels. Also, gambling opponents will probably make good on their promise to sue the state to remove the provisions. But for now, the important thing is that the budget has passed. We can now take a quick rest, evaluate where we stand, and determine what we need to do to ensure the best implementation possible of this new plan.

As the details emerge from the final budget bill, a list of all changes and supporting documents will be posted as available at www.oagc.com/?q=statebudget .

I would like to personally thank all of the gifted advocates who testified, wrote, emailed and phoned legislators, and generally supported the advocacy efforts of OAGC on behalf of Ohio's gifted children. This is truly a grassroots effort success story. Along the way, we probably have upset a policymaker or two with our impassioned efforts, but I am amazed at the many new friends we now have in the General Assembly. At the end of the day, our message was a simple one eloquently voiced by sixth grader, Lydia Gray before the Senate Education committee. Lydia who completely charmed both

senators and hardened lobbyists alike asked legislators to invest in her. On her part, she promised to give them “a good return” on their investment. Legislators and the governor have made the down payment on that investment. We must now ensure that they finish their investment “installments” and that we provide the return. It will be a long journey along a new path, but I know that we can be successful.

I hope that all of you will take a few minutes to phone or email your legislators to thank them for their support of gifted children in this budget. It is important to do this. You can find your Ohio Senator and Representative by going to <http://www.oagc.com/?q=/leginfo> .

National News

As of press time, the news was not good for Javits funding. The House Labor, Health, Human Services and Education Appropriations Sub-Committee has zeroed out Javits funding. I will provide updates about the Javits status on the OAGC website as they occur. Or you can go directly to the National Association for Gifted Children website for more information at <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=585> .

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